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ABSTRACT

While most training and development/institutional development professionals are familiar with either the world of formal higher education or the world of training in the business/industrial sector, few training and development practitioners are familiar with both. It is necessary to coordinate the efforts between these two spheres in order to develop the curriculum needed to produce professional trainers and human resource development (HRD) specialists. To determine where joint efforts between these two worlds will be beneficial, one must first explore the similarities and differences between higher education and training and development as they exist in the following areas: regulation of the education/training process, training/education goals, method of delivering training (credit versus skills), perceptions of the learner's role, and learner motivations in different settings. Educators entering the trainer's world must work for credibility in that world by adopting the mindset of the local training community. They must strive for a balance between theoretical and practical experiences in designing course-work and projects. Most important to establishing a program to train HRD practitioners is a willingness to accept trainers as professional educators working in a different setting with different constraints and resources. (MN)

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TRAINING REAL WORLD TRAINERS FROM THE IVORY TOWER

Invited Paper for the
Second Invitational Conference on Academic
Practitioners in Training and Development/
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A LITTLE BACKGROUND

Most training and development/instructional development professionals are already familiar with either the world of formal higher education or the world of training and development in the business, industrial sector. While some people have alternated between those two worlds with some ease and facility, the majority of practitioners in training and development, in human resource development (HRD), and in higher education have labored in one area or the other with little crossover. This has been a normal state of affairs for some time. Now, however, events outside of the field are moving the two areas closer together. It is a time when each group needs to better understand the other so we can coordinate our efforts to develop the curriculum needed to produce professional trainers and HRD specialists.

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ALIKE...BUT DIFFERENT

The first thing needed is to explore the similarities and differences between higher education and training and development. If each area understands the underlying reasons for the behavior of the other, we can dispel some of the more common myths and find out where joint efforts will produce joint success. The "town and gown" friction has been around for several hundred years now and is not likely to disappear unless we consciously work to overcome it. More bluntly put, if you let personalities and prejudices get in the way or decide you don't want to understand, you won't. Caveat discens.

REGULATION

One of the first differences between higher education and the training field is the regulation of each. Most organizations in business and industry are allowed to set up training programs to meet their own needs. There is little outside regulation of the training process itself, although there may be EEO rules, union agreements and the like. Higher education is, for better or worse, usually directly regulated by an agency of the state government. Further, if the institution is part of a state

higher education network, it is even more tightly controlled and those in the system are state employees. There may even be a civil service system for both faculty and staff. It is usually dependent on the legislature for funding. Even if the institution is private, major programs and curriculum changes are subject to state review and approval. Further, the institution itself is subject to review by regional accreditation associations. Further still, programs within the institution are often reviewed and accredited by professional associations. (Interestingly enough, ASTD does not perform this function or set up professional guidelines.) Thus, programs and institutions are under continual regulation.

On the other hand, business/industry/government generally has more freedom to create training programs which directly meet the organization's immediate needs. This difference in freedom undoubtedly stems from the fact that the business of educational institutions is training while in business/industry training is an adjunct to its main business. The implications of this difference are manifested in who is taught, what is taught, and, perhaps most important, how it will be taught. More on that last a bit later.

TRAINING/EDUCATION GOALS

The second major difference between the two areas (which stems directly from the first) lies in the goals of the training and the amount of training given.

The overall goal of formal education is training for a "lifetime" or, at least, a "career." The training¹ is for a family of jobs which the learner may encounter in the next five to ten years or more. In contrast, industry training is more likely to be job specific. The skills taught are those which will be needed on the job in the near future. As new skills are needed or the job changes, the employee is often retrained. These different goals shape the expectations of the trainee and training group. In business/industry, the trainee is often regarded as a long term employee who will be trained to meet company and employee needs. In higher education, the student² is considered to be a once-around learner³ and all relevant training must be given

¹Notice sometime how most higher education people bristle at the thought that they "train." They do not! By definition, (usually their own), they "educate" rather than train.

²Notice the shift in terms--from trainee to student.

³Once-around means the learner will go through a program once--thus an institution of higher education usually has only one opportunity to "educate."

be given at this point in time. Under these circumstances, it is only natural that any formal education would emphasize some theory which could be applied in a variety of situations at different times in the future. With different goals and a different time frame for training, business/industry training naturally encompasses smaller segments of job related instruction stretched over a period of time and offered as the employee/trainee needs to learn. The important point here is that neither approach is inherently better than the other. The ground rules and needs of the different fields more or less force a different view of training. Even more important is the fact that neither area can make changes prohibited by the institution or organization. Thus, argument over these non-negotiable "givens" becomes an exercise in futility.⁴

CREDITS VERSUS SKILLS

The third major difference between the two areas is how training will be delivered. As before, those previously

⁴For example, arguments over the "relevance" of theory versus application become moot. Even if practitioners in one area did want to adopt the other's approach, the organization/institution would probably be against it.

existing assumptions and systems regulating the organization or the institution will determine the nature of the training. In higher education, for example, credit for class is based on the Carnegie unit--a credit hour and contact hour approach. Traditionally the training period is a number of classes per week at a regular time spread out over a number of weeks. The standard Carnegie unit approach allows transfer of credit from one institution to another--something needed in education. In contrast, training in business and industry is often compressed into a single, continuous, period of intensive instruction. Transfer of credit is of no concern.⁵ And any training/education system geared for one approach is predictably resistant to any changes toward the other. Directly related to this fact is the fourth difference--the learner.

THE LEARNER/TRAINEE...WHAT S/HE THINKS ABOUT INSTRUCTION.

Perceptions of the learner's role make a great difference in the training process. In higher education, the learner pays to be instructed. In business/industry, the opposite is

⁵Why transfer credit? The employee is permanent, remember?

generally true--the student is paid to attend class. Therefore, in business/industry shortening a course (while maintaining the same end-of-course performance by the trainee) is considered beneficial. In higher education, however, shortening a course may be looked on as short-changing the student in terms of time paid for--and the student may raise the question.⁶ The implication is that in the education sector, the student's time is free; in business and industry, it is seen as an expense. This difference gives rise to differences in scheduling, in the amount of homework given, and in the amount of instructional time devoted to more general information as opposed to directly job-related skills.

A longstanding traditional role of the learner also comes into play. Learners in higher education are generally perceived as supplicants gathered at the fount of wisdom. Learners in business/industry often (but not always) have a better chance of being perceived as practitioners seeking some additional skills. The difference in roles also shapes the approach to instruction.

⁶ In 1978, some New York colleges missed three class sessions because of snow. As a result, the question was raised--by the institutions and the state--about plans to make up the missed classes. The central issue was time in class--mastery of skills was secondary.

WHY PEOPLE BOTHER TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW

Learner motivations may also be different although the motivational factors involved are so complex as to almost defy any such simplistic statement. Motivation may--or may not--be higher in business/industry or higher education. For example, who is the more motivated--the trainee whose job performance depends on the training or the prehire who has invested money in gaining some general skills and a degree? Prehires entering a degree program in higher education are often aware that there may be no immediate payoff in terms of the job and that their training will be general and will cover a longer period of time. Thus they may welcome a broad approach. The same broad approach may frustrate those already employed. We have barely scratched the surface of learner motivation.

While there are more differences which could be explored--program funding, organizational rewards, grading--there is one final difference that needs to be dealt with.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS...MORE ALIKE THAN TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS

Strangely enough, programs on a given subject in different institutions of higher education are more similar to each other than are training programs on a given subject

in business/industry. This is only natural because of the regulation of the higher education enterprise and the need to move "credits" from one institution to another. This similarity means that higher education, while less directly applicable to a specific job skill, is more applicable to the family of skills. It also means that the "curriculum" for a specific field will probably have a common core--no matter how different course descriptions may seem.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING...SIMILAR WORLDS EXISTING APART

All these differences lead to the first step on the part of the "educator" in designing curriculum for "trainers." Even though the "trainer" and the "educator" may nominally and functionally do the same thing--teach people skills--their operational environments are worlds apart. To serve business/industry, the educator must recognize these differences and set aside his or her world and enter that of the training practitioner. The problems of trainer must be approached not with solutions from the educational world but with solutions derived from the context of the trainer's world.

As the educator enters the trainer's world, an additional factor--a personal factor--often creeps in. In

the land of higher education, the faculty receive respect automatically because of their ranks and degrees rather than their functions. They are accustomed to be listened to. This is not true of the trainer. (This may be a sore point between trainer and academic.) Furthermore, when the trainer enters the educator's world, he or she is asked to earn respect through the coin of the institution--course grades and degrees. When, in turn, the educator enters the world of the trainer, it seems only natural that the educator should start anew (like the aforementioned trainer) and earn respect in the coin of the training community--performance and demonstration of skills. Yet this often is not the attitude of the educator who expects deference due to rank. This difference alone can cause untold, unpredicted problems.

CROSSING THE BAR

If the educator would enter the trainer's world, a new language must be learned; new procedures must be learned and accepted; needs and problems must be viewed within a different organizational context. In short, the educator must work for credibility in the trainer's world. Dues must

be paid. To establish credibility, the educator should consider:

- participation in the activities of the local chapters of related professional associations, for example, ASTD, NSPI, STC, especially those which are particularly active in the locality;
- membership in national organizations related to training and development and human resource development;
- continuous review of training and human resource development publications with an eye toward the trends, issues, and problems and especially the language used;
- direct, informal contact with trainers in local business/industry/government;
- an attempt to determine the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by a trainer to carry out his/her everyday tasks--which implies knowing just what those tasks are;
- an attempt to identify the local training and human resource development interests, for example, technical skills training, organizational development, management training;

--an attempt to identify the thrust of local business and industry using training extensively and effectively, for example, manufacturing, product maintenance, human services.

The educator, for all intents and purposes, must adopt the mindset of the local training community.

WHY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY...

The local community is stressed because training is more likely to have a local cohesiveness and focus than a national focus. If a curriculum for trainers is to be developed, the primary goal should be to meet local needs. Currently, most higher education institutions now offering training and development programs do seem to meet local needs. The reason for this is twofold. First, it is more likely that the students will emerge from the local area. Second, there is no common agreement on the role of the trainer. The term, "trainer" can mean platform trainer, a course developer, training manager, or an interpersonal facilitator and team builder--to name but a few.

In the absence of national agreement, local agreement seems the most logical starting point.

ACTUALLY BUILDING A CURRICULUM FOR TRAINERS

The preliminary steps of meshing with the training community can easily take several months or longer to accomplish. These first steps are usually followed by a more formal involvement such as the formation of an advisory committee composed of representatives of the training and human resource development community. There is some debate about the organizational level of members chosen for the committee-- that is, should they be training managers at an administrative level or practicing trainers from the classroom or course development level. There is no right answer. Common sense dictates a mixture of both. Those professional association activities and direct contacts should provide the educator with some feeling for the composition of the committee. However, in-depth contacts should definitely precede the formation of any advisory committee. Another good rule is that the committee should have a real, rather than a ceremonial, function. The committee should not be viewed simply as a rubber stamp for the program or only as potential employers of graduates and interns. Able committee members will perceive their true roles. The involvement must be real and the educator should be prepared to accept, if at all possible, the majority of the committee's recommendations.⁷

⁷ The committee should be brought to understand the nature and structure of higher education so the commendations can realistically be implemented.

Willingness to accept committee recommendations for a curriculum implies that prior to the formation of the committee, any existing curriculum must first be reviewed from the viewpoint of the training community. This must be done with an eye toward possible changes and not simply with the idea of defending the status quo. A serious commitment to change includes not only the development of new program elements but a willingness to change current curriculum. This can mean modifying (if needed) student projects as well as changing examples offered by instructors in class. (This simple change can be quite difficult for tenured professors unfamiliar with the training process in business and industry). Adopting a new curriculum further implies a commitment to select new faculty or to retrain faculty members who need it. The point is, "If advice is requested, be prepared to accept it and implement it."

WHO COMES TO SCHOOL

A higher education program in training and HRD will usually draw two major types of students--trainers who already are employed and who seek a degree or some general skills which cannot be obtained through their employers or other immediate sources. The second group is composed of students without training backgrounds but who wish to enter the training and

development field. The two groups generally have different expectations and may exhibit different behaviors. The former group seeks degrees and yet may evaluate a course on its immediate application to the current job. The latter group is more likely to accept a more general and theoretical approach preparing them for the field in general. This means that coursework and projects must be practical--as opposed to theoretical--to be valued by the practicing trainer yet still be general enough to suit the pre hires. This paradox can easily create no-win situations for the faculty. In addition, student support systems and administrative procedures may also be viewed in a different light by the practicing trainer. It is, for example, difficult (and embarrassing) to explain why course registration should take two hours when a transcontinental airline ticket, with seat reservations, can be scheduled and paid for in a matter of minutes. Thus, the total relationship between institution and both kinds of students should be carefully examined and modified as needed.

Even expecting theory, students without jobs and training experience will look ahead to placement. They will perceive the value of experience. They are seeking what the practicing trainer brings to class. Because most employers also seek some kind of experience, provision for practical training, real projects, and internships should be incorporated into the curriculum.

A final consideration is that the program does in practice what the theory suggests. The educator must practice what is preached. Further, it must be done at an adult level.

Experienced trainers have a tendency to evaluate programs and coursework on the basis of their own standards and practices--most, firmly rooted in teaching their peers. Any program must do the same. Failure to do so weakens program credibility.

WHERE WE ARE

There is no single right way to establish a program to train practitioners in training and development and human resource development. Moreover, there is not even (as yet) a commonly agreed upon core of skills and knowledge (competencies, if you will) for the training and HRD field as a whole. There are broad variations of the skills needed not only nationally but within the same large company. This leads to first developing a program that will serve local needs.

The curriculum development should be based on personal involvement at the local level and a willingness to gain credibility in the training world. Through personal contact with the local training community, a list of the most needed skills should be developed while at the same time, any existing program elements--including faculty and support services--are evaluated in light of the expectations of the training community.

If the decision to establish a program--or modify one-- is made, formal advice from trainers is sought and, if at all possible, implemented. Underlying the whole process should be a feeling of mutual respect and cooperation--a willingness to accept trainers as professional educators working in a different setting with different constraints and resources. This willingness is probably the single most important factor contributing to the success of a program in training and development.